United Nations

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1643
12 May 1994

THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council President condemns illegal attempt in Haiti to replace President Aristide; reaffirms its commitment to restoring democracy there in accordance with Governors Island Agreement.

+ Secretary-General, in Paris, convenes high-level meeting on former Yugoslavia; stresses need for comprehensive approach to situation and early convening of international conference.

+ Secretary-General proposes that Security Council refine definition of safe areas and UNPROFOR's related mission; says safe-area concept should not be extended in Bosnia and Herzegovina, citing Force's limited resources.

+ International Tribunal on war crimes committed in former Yugoslavia adopts rules on the detention of persons awaiting trial or appeal; amends Rules of Procedure and Evidence for sexual assault cases.

+ Special Committee on Israeli Human Rights Practices completes mission to Egypt, Jordan and Syria; says situation in occupied territories has worsened since signing of Declaration of Principles by Israel and PLO.

+ Mexico asks United Nations for technical assistance for forthcoming elections.

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The Security Council has strongly condemned the attempt in Haiti to replace the country's legitimate President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. In a statement issued by its President, Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria) yesterday, the Council reaffirmed its condemnation of any such illegal attempt to remove President Aristide. It stressed that participants in any illegal governments in Haiti were subject to the travel restrictions and the freezing of funds provided for in resolution 917 (1994).

(more)



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The Council reaffirmed its determination to ensure full and effective compliance with all relevant resolutions. It also reaffirmed its commitment to the restoration of democracy in Haiti and the return of President Aristide, under the framework of the Governors Island Agreement.

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Continuing his visit to Paris, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today convened a high-level meeting on all aspects of the situation in the former Yugoslavia. It was attended by Thorvald Stoltenberg and Lord Owen, Co-Chairmen of the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia; Special Representative Yasushi Akashi; Under-Secretaries-General Kofi Annan and Marrack Goulding; and General Bertrand de Lapresle, Commander of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR).

During the meeting, the Secretary-General reaffirmed the need for a comprehensive approach to all the problems of the former Yugoslavia, which could best be addressed through the early convening of an international conference. He also underlined the need for a general cease-fire throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, and urged all parties to make that possible.

The meeting also dealt with the impossibility of applying the safe-area concept to Brcko; the reopening of Tuzla airport for humanitarian flights; efforts to secure the release of 11 French nationals being held by the Bosnian Serbs; and the fragility of the cease-fire in Croatia. The Secretary-General noted that a conference on the reconstruction of Sarajevo would be convened in Vienna on 24 May, and appealed for generous contributions to the trust fund established for that purpose.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has proposed that the Security Council refine its definition of the safe-area concept, and support the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in implementing it more effectively. In a report to the Council dated 9 May, the Secretary-General said UNPROFOR's mission in relation to the Bosnian safe areas should be more clearly defined. The safe areas should be delineated, as proposed by UNPROFOR, and respected by all parties. He also urged that complete freedom of movement for humanitarian aid be ensured on a "notification", as opposed to a "clearance", basis.

The safe areas were intended to protect people, not to defend territory, and UNPROFOR's protection of them was not intended to make it a party to the conflict, the Secretary-General said. That mission should not detract from, but rather enhance, the Force's original mandate, namely supporting humanitarian operations and the overall peace process. UNPROFOR's mandate must take into account its resource limitations and the conflicting priorities inevitably arising from unfolding events. He stressed that UNPROFOR must remain impartial, and must use force only in clearly defined circumstances and in response to actions by the parties to the conflict.

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The Secretary-General said the safe-area concept should not be extended in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as UNPROFOR was already "overstretched and underresourced." He expressed concern about the continuing shortfall in troop contributions, adding that the Force must receive sufficient human and material resources for the tasks entrusted to it.

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The International Tribunal on war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia has adopted rules governing the detention of persons who are awaiting trial or an appeal before it. The rules cover the management of the detention centre, the rights of detainees, and their removal and transportation. The Tribunal took that action at the end of its third session in the Hague last week.

The Tribunal also unanimously amended its Rules of Procedure and Evidence so that, in sexual assault cases, no corroboration of the victim's testimony would be required. Consent would not be allowed as a defence if the victim had been threatened or feared psychological oppression, and prior sexual conduct would not be admitted in evidence. The Tribunal also approved a list of judges who will be assigned on a monthly basis to review any indictments issued by the Office of the Prosecutor.

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The Special Committee on Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People of the Occupied Territories last week completed a field mission to Egypt, Jordan and Syria. The Committee was established by the General Assembly in 1968 to investigate such practices in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, and to report through the Secretary-General to the General Assembly.

During the mission, the Committee received testimony from 37 witnesses with recent and first-hand knowledge of the situation in the occupied territories. It focused on human rights developments since the signing of the Declaration of Principles by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) last year. The Committee noted that despite the Declaration and the expectations raised by it, the human rights situation in the occupied territories had deteriorated rather than improved. While more than 1,000 prisoners had been released since the signing, the number of administrative detentions and arrests had increased, causing uncertainty about the number of people still under detention.

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The Government of Mexico has formally asked the United Nations for assistance with regard to national elections there next August, according to a spokesman for the Organization. He noted that the request was for technical assistance and did not relate to the verification or conduct of the elections. A team from the Electoral Assistance Unit of the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations is currently in Mexico City.

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